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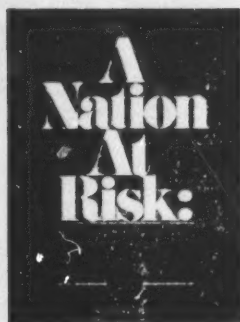
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ABSTRACT

The National Commission on Excellence in Education authored a report, "A Nation At Risk," that investigates the declining state of the educational system in America, identifies specific problem areas, and offers multiple recommendations for improvement. This publication is designed to help school administrators use the Commission's report to improve schools and build support for quality education. It contains the complete text of the report, an outline of key concepts in the report, questions administrators may be asked about the report, and possible frameworks around which administrators may wish to build their own answers. Specific suggestions are offered administrators including using the report as a basis for discussions or planning sessions involving various groups along with ways to structure the format for such meetings. Other suggestions include forming a coalition for excellence in the community, and communicating the key concepts mentioned in the report to the community through speeches, newsletters, the news media, and personal contact. (MLF)



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Published by the American Association of School Administrators

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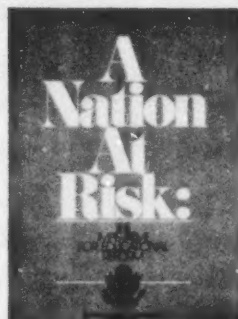
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The Excellence Report

Using It to Improve Your Schools

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Education Is Back on the Agenda

Education is the most important job facing our nation today and in the years to come. For those of us who are professional educators, of course, that is hardly news. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has vigorously asserted that viewpoint since its founding in 1865. But at times it seemed few Americans were listening.

Recently, however, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released the results of a comprehensive survey of American education. The Commission's report, called *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, has captured the nation's attention.

Suddenly, education is front-page news again. The report has stimulated a lively discussion about our nation's schools. Much of the discussion has focused on how to make schools better and the need for the American people to take a deeper interest in their schools.

Whenever problems are pointed out or changes are recommended, people have a tendency to draw back, to become defensive. As educators, we must avoid that temptation. Instead, we must use the contents of the report as a launching pad for improvement. This publication is designed to help you do just that. Please consider our suggestions on page 16.

The Commission has done a commendable job of outlining a number of pressing problems facing the schools. It clearly shows all Americans the challenge we face during the next few years. It also reaffirms some basic beliefs of AASA and its members.

First, the report restates our deep and historical national interest in education: "A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom. For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence." Schools thrive on citizen understanding that education is essential to our freedom and our American way of life. Let's communicate that message far and wide.

In addition, the Commission notes that "learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the 'information age' we are entering." Our national prosperity and even our national defense depend on an educated citizenry.

A national commitment to education, according to the report, is also "an investment in ever-renewable human resources that are more durable and flexible than capital plant and equipment." Education must be available to all citizens—of every age, income, sex, race, and ability.

Finally, the Commission recognizes the importance of the

educational administrator's role in leadership for learning. The report notes that "leadership skills involving persuasion, setting goals and developing community consensus behind them" will be particularly important in coming years.

AASA welcomes the Commission's report. We are pleased that education is back on the American agenda. We know that recently school administrators have been frustrated by state lids on taxes, cutbacks in federal funds, and White House support for tuition tax credits, but we believe that this report can be an important first step in redefining and reexamining our national commitment to education.

This publication is designed to help you use the Commission's report to make your schools even better and build support for quality education. It contains:

- The complete text of the report
- An outline of key concepts in the report
- Questions you may be asked about the report
- Possible frameworks around which you may wish to build your own answers
- Specific suggestions on ways to use the report to build support and improve education in your school and community.

Once you've read the report, we hope you'll share it with your staff and with others in your community who are concerned about quality in education. You may even want to obtain additional copies and use the report as a basis for discussing the next step in your own efforts to make your community's schools even more effective.

Paul B. Salmon
Executive Director, AASA

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About the Commission

In August, 1981, Secretary of Education, T. H. Bell, appointed a National Commission on Excellence in Education. He asked that Commission to present a report on the quality of education in America to him and to the American people by April of 1983. The Commission's charter contained several specific charges to which they were to give particular attention. These included:

- Assessing the quality of teaching and learning in our Nation's public and private schools, colleges, and universities,

- Comparing American schools and colleges with those of other advanced nations;

- Studying the relationship between college admissions requirements and student achievement in high school;

- Identifying educational programs which result in notable student success in college;

- Assessing the degree to which major social and educational changes in the last quarter century have affected student achievement; and

- Defining problems which must be faced and overcome if we are successfully to pursue the course of excellence in education.

As part of its deliberations, the Commission held hearings, solicited papers, drew from research, and generally analyzed the challenges facing our nation's schools.

Members of the Commission included:

DAVID P. GARDNER (CHAIR)
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University of Utah and
President-Elect, University of
California
Salt Lake City, Utah

YVONNE W. LARSEN (VICE-CHAIR)
Immediate Past-President
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A Nation at Risk

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. This report is concerned with only one of the many causes and dimensions of the problem, but it is the one that undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility. We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.

Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them. This report, the result of 18 months of study, seeks to generate reform of our educational system in fundamental ways and to renew the Nation's commitment to schools and colleges of high quality throughout the length and breadth of our land.

That we have compromised this commitment is, upon reflection, hardly surprising, given the multitude of often conflicting demands we have

placed on our Nation's schools and colleges. They are routinely called on to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems that the home and other institutions either will not or cannot resolve. We must understand that these demands on our schools and colleges often exact an educational cost as well as a financial one.

On the occasion of the Commission's first meeting, President Reagan noted the central importance of education in American life when he said: "Certainly there are few areas of American life as important to our society, to our people, and to our families as our schools and colleges." This report, therefore, is as much an open letter to the American people as it is a report to the Secretary of Education. We are confident that the American people, properly informed, will do what is right for their children and for the generations to come.

The Risk

History is not kind to idlers. The time is long past when America's destiny was assured simply by an abundance of natural resources and inexhaustible human enthusiasm, and by our relative isolation from the malignant problems of older civilizations. The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. America's position in the world may once have been reasonably secure with only a few exceptionally well-trained men and women. It is no longer.

The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently than Americans and have government subsidies for development and export. It is not just that the South Koreans recently built the world's most efficient steel mill, or that American machine tools, once

the pride of the world, are being displaced by German products. It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier. If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all—old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority. Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the "information age" we are entering.

Our concern, however, goes well beyond matters such as industry and commerce. It also includes the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society. The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life. A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom.

For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence. Education helps form these common understandings, a point Thomas Jefferson made long ago in his justly famous dictum:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control

"We must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all—old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority."

with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.

Part of what is at risk is the promise first made on this continent: All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promise means that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself.

Indicators of the Risk

The educational dimensions of the risk before us have been amply documented in testimony received by the Commission. For example:

- International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.

- Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.

- About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent.

- Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.

- Over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school.

- The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over 50 points and average mathematics scores dropped nearly 40 points.

- College Board achievement tests also reveal consistent declines in recent years in such subjects as physics and English.

- Both the number and proportion of students demonstrating superior achievement on the SATs (i.e., those with scores of 650 or higher) have also dramatically declined.

- Many 17-year-olds do not possess the "higher order" intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay; and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps.

- There was a steady decline in science achievement scores of U.S. 17-year-olds as measured by national assessments of science in 1969, 1973, and 1977.

- Between 1975 and 1980, remedial mathematics courses in public 4-year colleges increased by 72 percent and now constitute one-quarter of all mathematics courses taught in those institutions.

- Average tested achievement of students graduating from college is also lower.

- Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in such basic skills as reading, writing, spelling, and computation. The Department of the Navy, for example, reported to the Commission that one-quarter of its recent recruits cannot read at the ninth grade level, the minimum needed simply to understand written safety instructions. Without remedial work they cannot even begin, much less complete, the sophisticated training essential in much of the modern military.

These deficiencies come at a time when the demand for highly skilled workers in new fields is accelerating rapidly. For example:

- Computers and computer-controlled equipment are penetrating every aspect of our lives—homes, factories, and offices.

- One estimate indicates that by the turn of the century millions of jobs will involve laser technology and robotics.

- Technology is radically transforming a host of other occupations. They include health care, medical science, energy production, food processing, construction, and the building, repair, and maintenance of sophisticated scientific, educational, military, and industrial equipment.

Analysts examining these indicators of student performance and the demands for new skills have made some chilling observations. Educational researcher Paul Hurd concluded at the end of a thorough national survey of student achievement that within the context of the modern scientific revolution, "We are raising a new generation of Americans that is scientifically and technologically illiterate." In a similar vein, John Slaughter, a former Director of the National Science Foundation, warned of "a growing chasm between a small scientific and technological elite and a citizenry ill-informed, indeed uninformed, on issues with a science component."

But the problem does not stop there, nor do all observers see it the same way. Some worry that schools may emphasize such rudiments as reading and computation at the expense of other essential skills such as comprehension, analysis, solving problems, and drawing conclusions. Still others are concerned that an over-emphasis on technical and occupational skills will leave little time for studying the arts and humanities that so enrich daily life, help maintain civility, and develop a sense of community. Knowledge of the humanities, they maintain, must be harnessed to science and technology if the latter are to remain creative and humane, just as the humanities need to be informed by science and technology if they are to remain relevant to the human condition. Another analyst, Paul Copperman, has drawn a sobering conclusion. Until now, he has noted:

Each generation of Americans has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach those of their parents.

It is important, of course, to recognize that *the average citizen* today is better educated and more knowl-

edgeable than the average citizen of a generation ago—more literate, and exposed to more mathematics, literature, and science. The positive impact of this fact on the well-being of our country and the lives of our people cannot be overstated. Nevertheless, *the average graduate* of our schools and colleges today is not as well-educated as the average graduate of 25 or 35 years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population completed high school and college. The negative impact of this fact likewise cannot be overstated.

Hope and Frustration

Statistics and their interpretation by experts show only the surface dimension of the difficulties we face. Beneath them lies a tension between hope and frustration that characterizes current attitudes about education at every level.

We have heard the voices of high school and college students, school board members, and teachers; of leaders of industry, minority groups, and higher education; of parents and State officials. We could hear the hope evident in their commitment to quality education and in their descriptions of outstanding programs and schools. We could also hear the intensity of their frustration, a growing impatience with shoddiness in many walks of American life, and the complaint that this shoddiness is too often reflected in our schools and colleges. Their frustration threatens to overwhelm their hope.

What lies behind this emerging national sense of frustration can be described as both a dimming of personal expectations and the fear of losing a shared vision for America.

On the personal level the student, the parent, and the caring teacher all perceive that a basic promise is not being kept. More and more young people emerge from high school ready neither for college nor for work. This predicament becomes more acute as the knowledge base continues its rapid expansion, the number of traditional jobs shrinks, and new jobs demand greater sophistication and preparation.

On a broader scale, we sense that this undertone of frustration has significant political implications, for it cuts across ages, generations, races, and political and economic groups. We have come to understand that the public will demand that edu-

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by political and educational leaders to search
for solutions . . .”

cational and political leaders act forcefully and effectively on these issues. Indeed, such demands have already appeared and could well become a unifying national preoccupation. This unity, however, can be achieved only if we avoid the unproductive tendency of some to search for scapegoats among the victims, such as the beleaguered teachers.

On the positive side is the significant movement by political and educational leaders to search for solutions—so far centering largely on the nearly desperate need for increased support for the teaching of mathematics and science. This movement is but a start on what we believe is a larger and more educationally encompassing need to improve teaching and learning in fields such as English, history, geography, economics, and foreign languages. We believe this movement must be broadened and directed toward reform and excellence throughout education.

Excellence in Education

We define “excellence” to mean several related things. At the level of the *individual learner*, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a *school or college* that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. Excellence characterizes a *society* that has adopted these policies, for it will then be prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Our Nation’s people and its schools and colleges must be committed to achieving excellence in all these senses.

We do not believe that a public commitment to excellence and educational reform must be made at the expense of a strong public commitment to the equitable treatment of our diverse population. The twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling have profound and practical meaning

for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice. To do so would deny young people their chance to learn and live according to their aspirations and abilities. It also would lead to a generalized accommodation to mediocrity in our society on the one hand or the creation of an undemocratic elitism on the other.

Our goal must be to develop the talents of all to their fullest. Attaining that goal requires that we expect and assist all students to work to the limits of their capabilities. We should expect schools to have genuinely high standards rather than minimum ones, and parents to support and encourage their children to make the most of their talents and abilities.

The search for solutions to our educational problems must also include a commitment to life-long learning. The task of rebuilding our system of learning is enormous and must be properly understood and taken seriously: Although a million and a half new workers enter the economy each year from our schools and colleges, the adults working today will still make up about 75 percent of the workforce in the year 2000. These workers, and new entrants into the workforce, will need further education and retraining if they—and we as a Nation—are to thrive and prosper.

The Learning Society

In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them, educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society. At the heart of such a society is the commitment to a set of values and to a system of education that affords all members the opportunity to stretch their minds to full capacity, from early childhood through adulthood, learning more as the world itself changes. Such a society has as a basic foundation the idea that educa-

tion is important not only because of what it contributes to one's career goals but also because of the value it adds to the general quality of one's life. Also at the heart of the Learning Society are educational opportunities extending far beyond the traditional institutions of learning, our schools and colleges. They extend into homes and workplaces; into libraries, art galleries, museums, and science centers; indeed, into every place where the individual can develop and mature in work and life. In our view, formal schooling in youth is the essential foundation for learning throughout one's life. But without life-long learning, one's skills will become rapidly dated.

In contrast to the ideal of the Learning Society, however, we find that for too many people education means doing the minimum work necessary for the moment, then coasting through life on what may have been learned in its first quarter. But this should not surprise us because we tend to express our educational standards and expectations largely in terms of "minimum requirements." And where there should be a coherent continuum of learning, we have none, but instead an often incoherent, outdated patchwork quilt. Many individual, sometimes heroic, examples of schools and colleges of great merit do exist. Our findings and testimony confirm the vitality of a number of notable schools and programs, but their very distinction stands out against a vast mass shaped by tensions and pressures that inhibit systematic academic and vocational achievement for the majority of students. In some metropolitan areas basic literacy has become the goal rather than the starting point. In some colleges maintaining enrollments is of greater day-to-day concern than maintaining rigorous academic standards. And the ideal of academic excellence as the primary goal of schooling seems to be fading across the board in American education.

Thus, we issue this call to all who care about America and its future; to parents and students; to teachers, administrators, and school board members; to colleges and industry; to union members and military leaders; to governors and State legislators; to the President; to members of Congress and other public officials; to members of learned and scientific societies; to the print and electronic media; to concerned cit-

izens everywhere. America is at risk.

We are confident that America can address this risk. If the tasks we set forth are initiated now and our recommendations are fully realized over the next several years, we can expect reform of our Nation's schools, colleges, and universities. This would also reverse the current declining trend—a trend that stems more from weakness of purpose, confusion of vision, underuse of talent, and lack of leadership, than from conditions beyond our control.

The Tools at Hand

It is our conviction that the essential raw materials needed to reform our educational system are waiting to be mobilized through effective leadership:

- The natural abilities of the young that cry out to be developed and the undiminished concern of parents for the well-being of their children;

- The commitment of the Nation to high retention rates in schools and colleges and to full access to education for all;

- The persistent and authentic American dream that superior performance can raise one's state in life and shape one's own future;

- The dedication, against all odds, that keeps teachers serving in schools and colleges, even as the rewards diminish;

- Our better understanding of learning and teaching and the implications of this knowledge for school practice, and the numerous examples of local success as a result of superior effort and effective dissemination;

- The ingenuity of our policymakers, scientists, State and local educators, and scholars in formulating solutions once problems are better understood;

- The traditional belief that paying for education is an investment in ever-renewable human resources that are more durable and flexible than capital plant and equipment, and the availability in this country of sufficient financial means to invest in education;

- The equally sound tradition, from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 until today, that the Federal Government should supplement State, local, and other resources to foster key national educational goals; and

- The voluntary efforts of individuals, businesses, and parent and civic groups to cooperate in strengthening educational programs.

These raw materials, combined with the unparalleled array of educational organizations in America, offer us the possibility to create a Learning Society, in which public, private, and parochial schools; colleges and universities; vocational and technical schools and institutes; libraries; science centers, museums, and other cultural institutions; and corporate training and retraining programs offer opportunities and choices for all to learn throughout life.

The Public's Commitment

Of all the tools at hand, the public's support for education is the most powerful. In a message to a National Academy of Sciences meeting in May 1982, President Reagan commented on this fact when he said:

This public awareness—and I hope public action—is long overdue. . . . This country was built on American respect for education. . . . Our challenge now is to create a resurgence of that thirst for education that typifies our Nation's history.

The most recent (1982) Gallup Poll of the *Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools* strongly supported a theme heard during our hearings: People are steadfast in their belief that education is the major foundation for the future strength of this country. They even considered education more important than developing the best industrial system or the strongest military force, perhaps because they understood education as the cornerstone of both. They also held that education is "extremely important" to one's future success, and that public education should be the top priority for additional Federal funds. Education occupied first place among 12 funding categories considered in the survey—above health care, welfare, and military defense, with 55 percent selecting public education as one of their first three choices. Very clearly, the public understands the primary importance of education as the foundation for a satisfying life, an enlightened and civil society, a strong economy, and a secure Nation.

At the same time, the public has no patience with undemanding and superfluous high school offerings. In another survey, more than 75 percent of all those questioned believed every

student planning to go to college should take 4 years of mathematics, English, history/U.S. government, and science, with more than 50 percent adding 2 years each for a foreign language and economics or business. The public even supports requiring much of this curriculum for students who do not plan to go to college. These standards far exceed the strictest high school graduation requirements of any State today, and they also exceed the admission standards of all but a handful of our most selective colleges and universities.

Another dimension of the public's support offers the prospect of constructive reform. The best term to characterize it may simply be the honorable word "patriotism." Citizens know intuitively what some of the best economists have shown in their research, that education is one of the chief engines of a society's material well-being. They know, too, that education is the common bond of a pluralistic society and helps tie us to other cultures around the globe. Citizens also know in their bones that the safety of the United States depends principally on the wit, skill, and spirit of a self-confident people, today and tomorrow. It is, therefore, essential—especially in a period of long-term decline in educational achievement—for government at all levels to affirm its responsibility for nurturing the Nation's intellectual capital.

And perhaps most important, citizens know and believe that the meaning of America to the rest of the world must be something better than it seems to many today. Americans like to think of this Nation as the pre-eminent country for generating the great ideas and material benefits for all mankind. The citizen is dismayed at a steady 15-year decline in industrial productivity, as one great American industry after another falls to world competition. The citizen wants the country to act on the belief, expressed in our hearings and by the large majority in the Gallup Poll, that education should be at the top of the Nation's agenda.

Findings

We conclude that declines in educational performance are in large part the result of disturbing inadequacies in the way the educational process itself is often conducted. The findings that follow, culled from a much more

extensive list, reflect four important aspects of the educational process: content, expectations, time, and teaching.

Findings Regarding Content

By content we mean the very "stuff" of education, the curriculum. Because of our concern about the curriculum, the Commission examined patterns of courses high school students took in 1964-69 compared with course patterns in 1976-81. On the basis of these analyses we conclude:

- Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose. In effect, we have a cafeteria-style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses. Students have migrated from vocational and college preparatory programs to "general track" courses in large numbers. The

"the public has no patience with undemanding and superfluous high school offerings."

proportion of students taking a general program of study has increased from 12 percent in 1964 to 42 percent in 1979.

- This curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive student choice, explains a great deal about where we find ourselves today. We offer intermediate algebra, but only 31 percent of our recent high school graduates complete it; we offer French I, but only 13 percent complete it, and we offer geography, but only 16 percent complete it. Calculus is available in schools enrolling about 60 percent of all students, but only 6 percent of all students complete it.

- Twenty-five percent of the credits earned by general track high school students are in physical and health education, work experience outside the school, remedial English and mathematics, and personal service and development courses, such as training for adulthood and marriage.

Findings Regarding Expectations

We define expectations in terms of the level of knowledge, abilities, and skills school and college graduates should possess. They also refer to the time, hard work, behavior, self-discipline, and motivation that are essential for high student achievement. Such expectations are expressed to students in several different ways:

- By grades, which reflect the degree to which students demonstrate their mastery of subject matter;
- Through high school and college graduation requirements, which tell students which subjects are most important;
- By the presence or absence of rigorous examinations requiring students to demonstrate their mastery of content and skill before receiving a diploma or a degree;
- By college admissions requirements, which reinforce high school standards; and
- By the difficulty of the subject matter students confront in their texts and assigned readings.

Our analyses in each of these areas indicate notable deficiencies:

- The amount of homework for high school seniors has decreased (two-thirds report less than 1 hour a night) and grades have risen as average student achievement has been declining.

- In many other industrialized nations, courses in mathematics (other than arithmetic or general mathematics), biology, chemistry, physics, and geography start in grade 6 and are required of *all* students. The time spent on these subjects, based on class hours, is about three times that spent by even the most science-oriented U.S. students, i.e., those who select 4 years of science and mathematics in secondary school.

- A 1980 State-by-State survey of high school diploma requirements reveals that only eight States require high schools to offer foreign language instruction, but none requires students to take the courses. Thirty-five States require only 1 year of mathematics, and 36 require only 1 year of science for a diploma.

- In 13 States, 50 percent or more of the units required for high school graduation may be electives chosen by the student. Given this freedom to choose the substance of

half or more of the education, many students opt for less demanding personal service courses, such as bachelor living.

- "Minimum competency" examinations (now required in 37 States) fall short of what is needed, as the "minimum" tends to become the "maximum," thus lowering educational standards for all.

- One-fifth of all 4-year public colleges in the United States must accept every high school graduate within the State regardless of program followed or grades, thereby serving notice to high school students that they can expect to attend college even if they do not follow a demanding course of study in high school or perform well.

- About 23 percent of our more selective colleges and universities reported that their general level of selectivity declined during the 1970s, and 29 percent reported reducing the number of specific high school courses required for admission (usually by dropping foreign language requirements, which are now specified as a condition for admission by only one-fifth of our institutions of higher education).

- Too few experienced teachers and scholars are involved in writing textbooks. During the past decade or so a large number of texts have been "written down" by their publishers to ever-lower reading levels in response to perceived market demands.

- A recent study by Education Products Information Exchange revealed that a majority of students were able to master 80 percent of the material in some of their subject-matter texts before they had even opened the books. Many books do not challenge the students to whom they are assigned.

- Expenditures for textbooks and other instructional materials have declined by 50 percent over the past 17 years. While some recommend a level of spending on texts of between 5 and 10 percent of the operating costs of schools, the budgets for basal texts and related materials have been dropping during the past decade and a half to only 0.7 percent today.

Findings Regarding Time

Evidence presented to the Commission demonstrates three disturbing facts about the use that American schools and students make of time:

(1) compared to other nations, American students spend much less time on school work; (2) time spent in the classroom and on homework is often used ineffectively; and (3) schools are not doing enough to help students develop either the study skills required to use time well or the willingness to spend more time on school work.

- In England and other industrialized countries, it is not unusual for academic high school students to spend 8 hours a day at school, 220 days per year. In the United States, by contrast, the typical school day lasts 6 hours and the school year is 180 days.

- In many schools, the time spent learning how to cook and drive counts as much toward a high school diploma as the time spent studying mathematics, English, chemistry, U.S. history, or biology.

- A study of the school week in the United States found that some schools provided students only 17 hours of academic instruction during the week, and the average school provided about 22.

- A California study of individual classrooms found that because of poor management of classroom time, some elementary students received only one-fifth of the instruction others received in reading comprehension.

- In most schools, the teaching of study skills is haphazard and unplanned. Consequently, many students complete high school and enter college without disciplined and systematic study habits.

Findings Regarding Teaching

The Commission found that not enough of the academically able students are being attracted to teaching; that teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement; that the professional working life of teachers is on the whole unacceptable; and that a serious shortage of teachers exists in key fields.

- Too many teachers are being drawn from the bottom quarter of graduating high school and college students.

- The teacher preparation curriculum is weighted heavily with courses in "educational methods" at the expense of courses in subjects to be taught. A survey of 1,350 institutions training teachers indicated that 41 percent of the time of elementary

school teacher candidates is spent in education courses, which reduces the amount of time available for subject matter courses.

- The average salary after 12 years of teaching is only \$17,000 per year, and many teachers are required to supplement their income with part-time and summer employment. In addition, individual teachers have little influence in such critical professional decisions as, for example, textbook selection.

- Despite widespread publicity about an overpopulation of teachers, severe shortages of certain kinds of teachers exist: in the fields of mathematics, science, and foreign languages; and among specialists in education for gifted and talented, language minority, and handicapped students.

- The shortage of teachers in mathematics and science is particularly severe. A 1981 survey of 45 States revealed shortages of mathematics teachers in 43 States, critical shortages of earth sciences teachers in 33 States, and of physics teachers everywhere.

- Half of the newly employed mathematics, science, and English teachers are not qualified to teach these subjects; fewer than one-third of U.S. high schools offer physics taught by qualified teachers.

Recommendations

In light of the urgent need for improvement, both immediate and long term, this Commission has agreed on a set of recommendations that the American people can begin to act on now, that can be implemented over the next several years, and that promise lasting reform. The topics are familiar; there is little mystery about what we believe must be done. Many schools, districts, and States are already giving serious and constructive attention to these matters, even though their plans may differ from our recommendations in some details.

We wish to note that we refer to public, private, and parochial schools and colleges alike. All are valuable national resources. Examples of actions similar to those recommended below can be found in each of them.

We must emphasize that the variety of student aspirations, abilities, and preparation requires that appropriate content be available to satisfy diverse needs. Attention must be di-

rected to both the nature of the content available and to the needs of particular learners. The most gifted students, for example, may need a curriculum enriched and accelerated beyond even the needs of other students of high ability. Similarly, educationally disadvantaged students may require special curriculum materials, smaller classes, or individual tutoring to help them master the material presented. Nevertheless, there remains a common expectation: We must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry.

Our recommendations are based on the beliefs that everyone can learn, that everyone is born with an *urge* to learn which can be nurtured, that a solid high school education is within the reach of virtually all, and that life-long learning will equip people with the skills required for new careers and for citizenship.

Recommendation A: Content

We recommend that State and local high school graduation requirements be strengthened and that, *at a minimum*, all students seeking a diploma be required to lay the foundations in the Five New Basics by taking the following curriculum during their 4 years of high school: (a) 4 years of English; (b) 3 years of mathematics; (c) 3 years of science; (d) 3 years of social studies; and (e) one-half year of computer science. For the college-bound, 2 years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier.

Whatever the student's educational or work objectives, knowledge of the New Basics is the foundation of success for the after-school years and, therefore, forms the core of the modern curriculum. A high level of shared education in these Basics, together with work in the fine and performing arts and foreign languages, constitutes the mind and spirit of our culture. The following Implementing Recommendations are intended as illustrative descriptions. They are included here to clarify what we mean by the essentials of a strong curriculum.

Implementing Recommendations

1. The teaching of *English* in high school should equip graduates to: (a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; (b) write well-organized, effective papers; (c) listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently; and (d) know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture.

2. The teaching of *mathematics* in high school should equip graduates to: (a) understand geometric and algebraic concepts; (b) understand elementary probability and statistics; (c) apply mathematics in everyday situations; and (d) estimate, approximate, measure, and test the accuracy of their calculations. In addition to the traditional sequence of studies available for college-bound students, new, equally demanding mathematics curricula need to be developed for those who do not plan to continue their formal education immediately.

3. The teaching of *science* in high school should provide graduates with an introduction to: (a) the concepts, laws, and processes of the physical and biological sciences; (b) the methods of scientific inquiry and reasoning; (c) the application of scientific knowledge to everyday life; and (d) the social and environmental implications of scientific and technological development. Science courses must be revised and updated for both the college-bound and those not intending to go to college. An example of such work is the American Chemical Society's "Chemistry in the Community" program.

4. The teaching of *social studies* in high school should be designed to: (a) enable students to fix their places and possibilities within the larger social and cultural structure; (b) understand the broad sweep of both ancient and contemporary ideas that have shaped our world; and (c) understand the fundamentals of how our economic system works and how our political system functions; and (d) grasp the difference between free and repressive societies. An understanding of each of these areas is requisite to the informed and committed exercise of citizenship in our free society.

5. The teaching of *computer science* in high school should equip graduates to: (a) understand the computer as an information, computation, and communication device; (b) use the computer in the study of the other Basics and for personal and work-related purposes; and (c) understand the world of computers, electronics, and related technologies.

In addition to the New Basics, other important curriculum matters must be addressed.

6. Achieving proficiency in a *foreign language* ordinarily requires from 4 to 6 years of study and should, therefore, be started in the elementary grades. We believe it is desirable that students achieve such proficiency because study of a foreign language introduces students to non-English-speaking cultures, heightens awareness and comprehension of one's native tongue, and serves the Nation's needs in commerce, diplomacy, defense, and education.

7. The high school curriculum should also provide students with programs requiring rigorous effort in subjects that advance students' personal, educational, and occupational goals, such as the fine and performing arts and vocational education. These areas complement the New Basics, and they should demand the same level of performance as the Basics.

8. The curriculum in the crucial eight grades leading to the high school years should be specifically designed to provide a sound base for study in those and later years in such areas as English language development and writing, computational and problem solving skills, science, social studies, foreign language, and the arts. These years should foster an enthusiasm for learning and the development of the individual's gifts and talents.

9. We encourage the continuation of efforts by groups such as the American Chemical Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Modern Language Association, and the National Councils of Teachers of English and Teachers of Mathematics, to revise, update, improve, and make available new and more diverse cur-

ricular materials. We applaud the consortia of educators and scientific, industrial, and scholarly societies that cooperate to improve the school curriculum.

Recommendation B: Standards and Expectations

We recommend that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct, and that 4-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission. This will help students do their best educationally with challenging materials in an environment that supports learning and authentic accomplishment.

Implementing Recommendations

1. Grades should be indicators of academic achievement so they can be relied on as evidence of a student's readiness for further study.

2. Four-year colleges and universities should raise their admissions requirements and advise all potential applicants of the standards for admission in terms of specific courses required, performance in these areas, and levels of achievement on standardized achievement tests in each of the five Basics and, where applicable, foreign languages.

3. Standardized tests of achievement (not to be confused with aptitude tests) should be administered at major transition points from one level of schooling to another and particularly from high school to college or work. The purposes of these tests would be to: (a) certify the student's credentials; (b) identify the need for remedial intervention; and (c) identify the opportunity for advanced or accelerated work. The tests should be administered as part of a nationwide (but not Federal) system of State and local standardized tests. This system should include other diagnostic procedures that assist teachers and students to evaluate student progress.

4. Textbooks and other tools of learning and teaching should be upgraded and updated to assure more

rigorous content. We call upon university scientists, scholars, and members of professional societies, in collaboration with master teachers, to help in this task, as they did in the post-Sputnik era. They should assist willing publishers in developing the products or publish their own alternatives where there are persistent inadequacies.

5. In considering textbooks for adoption, States and school districts should: (a) evaluate texts and other materials on their ability to present rigorous and challenging material clearly; and (b) require publishers to furnish evaluation data on the material's effectiveness.

6. Because no textbook in any subject can be geared to the needs of all students, funds should be made available to support text development in "thin-market" areas, such as those for disadvantaged students, the learning disabled, and the gifted and talented.

7. To assure quality, all publishers should furnish evidence of the quality and appropriateness of textbooks, based on results from field trials and credible evaluations. In view of the enormous numbers and varieties of texts available, more widespread consumer information services for purchasers are badly needed.

8. New instructional materials should reflect the most current applications of technology in appropriate curriculum areas, the best scholarship in each discipline, and research in learning and teaching.

Recommendation C: Time

We recommend that significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year.

Implementing Recommendations

1. Students in high schools should be assigned far more homework than is now the case.

2. Instruction in effective study and work skills, which are essential if school and independent time is to be used efficiently, should be introduced in the early grades and continued throughout the student's schooling.

3. School districts and State legislatures should strongly consider 7-hour school days, as well as a 200- to 220-day school year.

4. The time available for learning should be expanded through better classroom management and organization of the school day. If necessary, additional time should be found to meet the special needs of slow learners, the gifted, and others who need more instructional diversity than can be accommodated during a conventional school day or school year.

5. The burden on teachers for maintaining discipline should be reduced through the development of firm and fair codes of student conduct that are enforced consistently, and by considering alternative classrooms, programs, and schools to meet the needs of continually disruptive students.

6. Attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions should be used to reduce the amount of time lost through student absenteeism and tardiness.

7. Administrative burdens on the teacher and related intrusions into the school day should be reduced to add time for teaching and learning.

8. Placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, should be guided by the academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age.

Recommendation D: Teaching

This recommendation consists of seven parts. Each is intended to improve the preparation of teachers or to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession. Each of the seven stands on its own and should not be considered solely as an implementing recommendation.

1. Persons preparing to teach should be required to meet high educational standards, to demonstrate an aptitude for teaching, and to demonstrate competence in an academic discipline. Colleges and universities offering teacher preparation programs should be judged by how well their graduates meet these criteria.

2. Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based. Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review so that superior teachers can be rewarded, average ones encouraged, and poor ones either improved or terminated.

3. School boards should adopt an 11-month contract for teachers. This would ensure time for curriculum and professional development, programs for students with special needs, and a more adequate level of teacher compensation.

4. School boards, administrators, and teachers should cooperate to develop career ladders for teachers that distinguish among the beginning instructor, the experienced teacher, and the master teacher.

5. Substantial nonschool personnel resources should be employed to help solve the immediate problem of the shortage of mathematics and science teachers. Qualified individuals including recent graduates with mathematics and science degrees, graduate students, and industrial and retired scientists could, with appropriate preparation, immediately begin teaching in these fields. A number of our leading science centers have the capacity to begin educating and retraining teachers immediately. Other areas of critical teacher need, such as English, must also be addressed.

6. Incentives, such as grants and loans, should be made available to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession, particularly in those areas of critical shortage.

7. Master teachers should be involved in designing teacher preparation programs and in supervising teachers during their probationary years.

Recommendation E: Leadership and Fiscal Support

We recommend that citizens across the Nation hold educators responsible for providing the leadership necessary to achieve these reforms, and that citizens provide the fiscal support and stability required to bring about the reforms we propose.

Implementing Recommendations

1. Principals and superintendents must play a crucial leadership role in developing school and community support for the reforms we propose, and school boards must provide them with the professional development and other support required to carry out their leadership role effectively. The Commission stresses the distinction between leadership skills involving persuasion, setting goals and developing community consensus behind them, and managerial and supervisory skills. Although the latter are necessary, we believe that school boards must consciously develop leadership skills at the school and district levels if the reforms we propose are to be achieved.

2. State and local officials, including school board members, governors, and legislators, have the *primary responsibility* for financing and governing the schools, and should incorporate the reforms we propose in their educational policies and fiscal planning.

3. The Federal Government, in cooperation with States and localities, should help meet the needs of key groups of students such as the gifted and talented, the socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority and language minority students, and the handicapped. In combination these groups include both national resources and the Nation's youth who are most at risk.

4. In addition, we believe the Federal Government's role includes several functions of national consequence that States and localities alone are unlikely to be able to meet: protecting constitutional and civil rights for students and school personnel; collecting data, statistics, and in-

formation about education generally; supporting curriculum improvement and research on teaching, learning, and the management of schools; supporting teacher training in areas of critical shortage or key national needs; and providing student financial assistance and research and graduate training. We believe the assistance of the Federal Government should be provided with a minimum of administrative burden and intrusiveness.

5. The Federal Government has the *primary responsibility* to identify the national interest in education. It should also help fund and support efforts to protect and promote that interest. It must provide the national leadership to ensure that the Nation's public and private resources are marshaled to address the issues discussed in this report.

6. This Commission calls upon educators, parents, and public officials at all levels to assist in bringing about the educational reform proposed in this report. We also call upon citizens to provide the financial support necessary to accomplish these purposes. Excellence costs. But in the long run mediocrity costs far more.

America Can Do It

Despite the obstacles and difficulties that inhibit the pursuit of superior educational attainment, we are confident, with history as our guide, that we can meet our goal. The American educational system has responded to previous challenges with remarkable success. In the 19th century our land-grant colleges and universities provided the research and training that developed our Nation's natural resources and the rich agricultural bounty of the American farm. From the late 1800s through mid-20th century, American schools provided the educated workforce needed to seal the success of the Industrial Revolution and to provide the margin of victory in two world wars. In the early part of this century and continuing to this very day, our schools have absorbed vast waves of immigrants and educated them and their children to

productive citizenship. Similarly, the Nation's Black colleges have provided opportunity and undergraduate education to the vast majority of college-educated Black Americans.

More recently, our institutions of higher education have provided the scientists and skilled technicians who helped us transcend the boundaries of our planet. In the last 30 years, the schools have been a major vehicle for expanded social opportunity, and now graduate 75 percent of our young people from high school. Indeed, the proportion of Americans of college age enrolled in higher education is nearly twice that of Japan and far exceeds other nations such as France, West Germany, and the Soviet Union. Moreover, when international comparisons were last made a decade ago, the top 9 percent of American students compared favorably in achievement with their peers in other countries.

In addition, many large urban areas in recent years report that average student achievement in elementary schools is improving. More and more schools are also offering advanced placement programs and programs for gifted and talented students, and more and more students are enrolling in them.

We are the inheritors of a past that gives us every reason to believe that we will succeed.

A Word to Parents and Students

The task of assuring the success of our recommendations does not fall to the schools and colleges alone. Obviously, faculty members and administrators, along with policymakers and the mass media, will play a crucial role in the reform of the educational system. But even more important is the role of parents and students, and to them we speak directly.

To Parents

You know that you cannot confidently launch your children into today's world unless they are of strong character and well-educated in the use of language, science, and mathematics. They must possess a deep respect for intelligence, achievement, and learning, and the skills needed to use them; for setting goals; and for disciplined work. That respect must be accompanied by an intolerance for the shoddy and second-rate masquerading as "good enough."

You have the right to demand for your children the best our schools and colleges can provide. Your vigilance and your refusal to be satisfied with less than the best are the imperative first step. But your right to a proper education for your children carries a double responsibility. As surely as you are your child's first and most influential teacher, your child's ideas about education and its significance begin with you. You must be a *living* example of what you expect your children to honor and to emulate. Moreover, you bear a responsibility to participate actively in your child's education. You should encourage more diligent study and discourage satisfaction with mediocrity and the attitude that says "let it slide"; monitor your child's study; encourage good study habits; encourage your child to take more demanding rather than less demanding courses; nurture your child's curiosity, creativity, and confidence; and be an active participant in the work of the schools. Above all, exhibit a commit-

"America's place in the world will be either secured or forfeited."

ment to continued learning in your own life. Finally, help your children understand that excellence in education cannot be achieved without intellectual and moral integrity coupled with hard work and commitment. Children will look to their parents and teachers as models of such virtues.

To Students

You forfeit your chance for life at its fullest when you withhold your best effort in learning. When you give only the minimum to learning, you receive only the minimum in return. Even with your parents' best example and your teachers' best efforts, in the end it is *your* work that determines how much and how well you learn. When you work to your full capacity, you can hope to attain the knowledge and skills that will enable you to create your future and control your destiny. If you do not, you will have your future thrust upon you by others. Take hold of your life, apply your

gifts and talents, work with dedication and self-discipline. Have high expectations for yourself and convert every challenge into an opportunity.

A Final Word

This is not the first or only commission on education, and some of our findings are surely not new, but old business that now at last must be done. For no one can doubt that the United States is under challenge from many quarters.

Children born today can expect to graduate from high school in the year 2000. We dedicate our report not only to these children, but also to those now in school and others to come. We firmly believe that a movement of America's schools in the direction called for by our recommendations will prepare these children for far more effective lives in a far stronger America.

Our final work, perhaps better characterized as a plea, is that all segments of our population give attention to the implementation of our recommendations. Our present plight did not appear overnight, and the responsibility for our current situation is widespread. Reform of our educational system will take time and unwavering commitment. It will require equally widespread, energetic, and dedicated action. For example, we call upon the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine, Science Service, National Science Foundation, Social Science Research Council, American Council of Learned Societies, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Endowment for the Arts, and other scholarly, scientific, and learned societies for their help in this effort. Help should come from students themselves; from parents, teachers, and school boards; from colleges and universities; from local, State, and Federal officials; from teachers' and administrators' organizations; from industrial and labor councils; and from other groups with interest in and responsibility for educational reform.

It is their America, and the America of all of us, that is at risk; it is to each of us that this imperative is addressed. It is by our willingness to take up the challenge, and our resolve to see it through, that America's place in the world will be either secured or forfeited. Americans have succeeded before and so we shall again.

Key Concepts to Consider

The Commission addressed a number of concepts that are important keys to communicating the meaning of various issues. The following concepts are highlighted, many with actual quotes from the Commission's report.

- **Education is an investment, not an expense.**

Over and over, the Commission's report speaks of our nation's need to "invest" in the ever renewable human resources that are more durable and flexible than capital plant and equipment."

The time, energy, and dollars we devote to education represent one of the most vital investments our nation makes. And it is an investment that pays dividends for America. For example, following the launch of Sputnik, our nation invested heavily in math and science education. As a result, we became a technological giant. To maintain our national security, to strengthen our economy, and to maintain our nation's competitive place among the nations of the world, we must make a substantial investment in our human capital . . . our people. When you talk about investments, you shouldn't ask, "Is it too much?" When you talk about investments, you should always ask, "Is it enough?"

- **We can't afford the cost of neglect.**

The children in school today will be part of the nation's work force until at least 2048. The education they receive will determine our nation's future. If we do not invest in our human capital, we will pay the price—in reduced productivity, increased welfare costs, full jails, and greater social unrest. We have a choice. We can invest now or pay later. Our nation simply cannot afford the cost of neglect.

- **We have a deep national interest in education.**

As a nation, we pride ourselves on pluralism. We value our individual freedom. That diversity is the strength of our nation. Through education, our diverse population reaches "common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and

on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence." Our schools are the very foundation of our heritage and our freedom.

Education is crucial to our national defense. According to the report, "The safety of the United States depends on the wit, skill, and spirit of a self-confident people, today and tomorrow."

Thomas Jefferson and others made it clear long ago that education is basic to the survival of our free and democratic society.

- **More than at any time in our history, our nation's schools need to improve.**

We are entering a new "information age." And "knowledge, learning information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce. . . . Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the 'information age' we are now entering."

No matter how good our schools may have been in the past, the world is changing around us. Other nations, such as Japan and Germany, have increased their national commitment to education; so must we.

- **During the past several decades, education has been called on to provide solutions to personal, social, and political problems. Those demands exact an educational as well as a financial cost.**

In the past 20 years, Americans have expected schools to solve problems "that the home and other institutions either would not or could not resolve." Citizens demanded, and got, a more relevant curriculum. They requested, and received, courses in driver education, training for marriage and adulthood, and consumer education.

Now citizens are calling for a return to higher standards. Once again the schools will respond. But it takes widespread commitment from the entire community. There is a "nearly desperate need for increased support for the teaching of mathematics and science." Salaries for most teachers are so low that they are "forced to supplement their income with part-time and summer employment."

Some teachers are taking jobs outside the educational field. There is ample evidence that the best qualified people may not be entering the education profession.

It is also important to continue the education of those adults already in the workforce. The adults working today "will still make up about 75 percent of the workforce in the year 2000." Education must be seen as a lifelong process.

- **Schools must renew their commitment to excellence and equity.**

Schools must set "high expectations and goals for all learners, then [try] in every way possible to help students reach them." This commitment must not be made "at the expense of a strong public commitment to the equitable treatment of our diverse population. The twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice."

- **Schools are often a reflection of society, and education is everyone's responsibility.**

Schools reflect the society they serve. When that society values "getting by" and lack of effort, the schools reflect those values. When excellence, hard work, and learning are valued, the schools will reflect those commitments.

The Commission believes America should strive to become a "Learning Society," in which "education is important not only because of what it contributes to one's career goals but also because of the value it adds to the general quality of one's life." In the Learning Society, education is a lifelong process . . . and a lifelong responsibility.

Today, parents, nonparents, teachers, students, school board members, legislators and political leaders, the print and electronic media, military leaders, businesses, labor unions, and colleges and universities all have an important role to play.

Questions You Might Be Asked

The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education naturally raises a number of questions. The following questions and answers are presented to provide some thoughts on how some of those inquiries might be addressed.

Q: What ever happened to educational standards?

Schools have been trying to develop reasonable standards. That is one reason we have heard so much discussion of minimum competency requirements, teacher competency testing, tighter entrance requirements in colleges and universities, and so on.

However, standards may have dropped in the past because schools are a reflection of society. When communities demanded a relevant curriculum, our schools provided it. The result was often a smorgasbord of electives with not enough concentration on the essentials. Today, people are calling for a return to standards. Our schools will undoubtedly respond. However, we must be very careful that we do not lose the progress we've made in providing equal educational opportunity. Our concern about providing education for all, not just the chosen few, is a key to our real greatness as a nation.

Q: What do you think educators will do about these recommendations?

I hope educators will avoid the temptation to be defensive about the Commission's recommendations. Instead, I hope we have the wisdom to look at these recommendations in depth. Groups of educators and people from the community should work together to analyze what we're doing now and what we ought to be doing, if anything, to implement these recommendations. Schools vary in terms of how far they have come in pursuing the various recommendations of the Commission.

Then, I hope schools will decide which of the recommendations are

unacceptable; which objectives we can pursue immediately and won't cost money; and which objectives we want to pursue but there is a cost attached. Then, school administrators, teachers, board members, business people, parents, nonparents, government leaders, and others should join together to provide the resources and support needed to make schools even better. If we do that, I believe the Commission report can have a long-term, positive effect on our schools and on the future of our nation.

Q: What are the "New Basics" called for by the Commission?

The Commission has recommended that *at minimum*, all students seeking a high school diploma be required to take the following curriculum during their four years:

- (1) 4 years of English; (2) 3 years of mathematics; (3) 3 years of science; (4) 3 years of social studies; and (5) one-half year of computer science.

With the exception of computer science, these courses are already required of students enrolled in academic high school programs. Presumably, these recommendations apply to all students, including vocational education students, although how this might be accomplished remains unclear.

It is important to note that the Commission does not believe these are the *only* important subjects in the curriculum. It strongly recommends that all college-bound students take at least two years of foreign language. And the Commission also notes the importance of the fine and performing arts.

Many of the Commission's recommendations encompass what has traditionally been known as a "liberal arts education." For example, the study of English should not only help

students use the language but should also enable graduates to "know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture."

Q: The Commission has made several serious charges about the state of American education. Are they accurate?

In fact, the statistics the Commission has chosen to use may be somewhat outdated. The decline in SAT scores, according to the College Board, has stabilized and appears to be reversing. Students have taken an increasing number of academic courses in each of the last six years. Many states have already adopted stricter graduation standards. Many local school districts are also raising expectations for students.

As the report points out, American schools educate a larger proportion of our 17-year-olds than any other education system in the world. And it is important to remember that the average citizen is "better educated and more knowledgeable than the average citizen of a generation ago—more literate, and exposed to more mathematics, literature, and science." According to the United Nations, the U.S. has one of the highest literacy rates in the world. The report states that there are 23 million people in the nation who are functionally illiterate. Whether that number is accurate or not is not the issue. One person who is functionally illiterate is one too many. What we need is the support to solve the problem.

The challenges our nation will face during the next several decades require an increasingly educated and sophisticated population. Literacy alone will not suffice. Given the commitment of America's citizens to educational excellence, we hope all educational leaders will welcome the challenge of helping America main-

tain and build its position of leadership into the next century.

Q: Isn't the report just another attempt to get more money for the schools?

No. In fact, the report first asks for citizens to be committed to the nation's schools. It lists such examples as helping students study, or becoming more informed about schools—efforts that don't cost a cent.

Nevertheless, money is important. When the Japanese decided that their economic well-being depended on a more educated workforce, they increased teachers' salaries dramatically. One of the reasons that there is such a shortage of science and math teachers is that starting salaries for teachers are, in many cases, about \$10,000 less than for comparable jobs in business and industry.

Furthermore, education is an *investment*, not an expense. And the cost of neglect is something we can't afford. If we don't invest in education now, we'll pay in lost productivity, increased welfare costs, more jails, and social unrest.

Q: What about the federal role in education?

We have a deep national interest in education. Education is basic to the survival of our democracy. It is basic to a strong economy. Education is basic to our national security and our nation's competitive position among the nations of the world. Naturally, there is a federal role in education. For example, because of the mobile nature of our population, the federal government must be concerned with the child who begins school in Arkansas, attends junior high in Minnesota, and graduates from high school in Florida.

The federal government also needs to assume certain functions that states and localities alone are unlikely to be able to meet. The Commission suggests such things as "protecting constitutional and civil rights; supporting curriculum im-

"Groups of educators and people from the community should work together to analyze what we're doing now and what we ought to be doing."

provement and research; supporting teacher training in areas of critical shortage or key national needs; and providing student financial assistance and research and graduate training."

Although the Commission was not charged with making funding recommendations, a number of these areas, supporting teacher training in areas of critical shortage or key national needs, for example, point to a need for a substantial federal dollar commitment.

Finally, it should be noted that strong federal commitment to solving a problem can have significant impact. Many observers believe that the dramatic gains made by Black children on tests of reading and mathematical skills in the National Assessment of Educational Progress can be attributed at least in part to the Title I program, which offered federal support to programs on behalf of disadvantaged children.

Following the launch of Sputnik, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) provided support for math and science programs. Of course, education is the responsibility of the states and citizens retain local control, but we also have some deep national interests in education that require federal support.

Q: Does the Commission believe that tuition tax credits are the answer to the problems of the schools?

Many people who have not read the full report of the Commission might have been misled by President Reagan's comments when the report was released. The subjects on which he chose to concentrate his remarks—abolition of the Education Department, prayer in schools, tuition tax

credits, and vouchers—are for the most part unrelated to, and in some cases strikingly different from, the findings of the Commission.

The public schools are the cornerstone of our democracy. Tuition tax credits would chip away at that cornerstone. An AASA study has indicated that President Reagan's tuition tax credit proposal would result, after a few years, in private schools receiving the equivalent of three times as much support as public schools. That situation would cause neglect of our public schools. That we simply can't afford. In the case of parochial schools, there is, of course, the issue of separation of church and state.

Q: What about the Commission's recommendations for a longer school day and school year?

Research on education has found that the more time students spend learning a subject, the more likely they are to master it. For that reason, the Commission has recommended "more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year."

Many schools have already taken steps to use the school day more effectively. By adopting recommendations made by researchers in the area of time on task, many schools are trying to make every instructional minute count. Several school districts, including the entire state of Mississippi, are considering lengthened school years. And with parental support, many school districts are increasing the amount of homework students are expected to complete.

Of course, virtually all of these proposals have financial implications, and all require community support.

Suggestions on Using the Report

How can I use this report to make our schools even more effective and build support?

1. Read the report. It does point out problems that schools must overcome. Those problems may or may not exist in your schools. But by its very existence, this report is an indication that education is back on our nation's agenda. Once you have read the report, begin to think about your own priorities for action.

2. Obtain additional copies of the report to share with your staff, school board, parents, and others. Ask them to study it carefully. Then, use the report as a basis for discussions or planning sessions. You may wish to have groups meet in each school and department. Or you may wish to form groups made up of people from various curriculum areas, departments and levels of administration to discuss the report and suggest further action. You might want to consider involving people from the community, such as parents, nonparent taxpayers and business people in these meetings as well.

3. The format for these meetings might be structured like this:

a. Ask that all participants read the report in advance.

b. In small groups of eight to ten, participants should comment on and discuss the opening sections of the report. A leader and recorder should be appointed and all comments should be channeled to the school principal at the building level, and in all cases to a central point in the school system. All participants should be asked not to be defensive about the report, but to find in it opportunities for improvement in education and greater support. This discussion might take about an hour.

c. Then, each group should discuss each of the basic recommendations made in the report. A format for the discussion might include:

- What are we doing now in our schools to address this problem?

- What should we be doing?

- What basic plan of action should we consider following in making needed changes?

- How important are these changes? Rate each change suggested: Very Important, Important, Not Important.

This information from this session should also be shared with the principal at the building level and channelled to a central point in the school system.

d. Individual schools may wish to use the results of these discussions to develop a "local school improvement focus."

e. The school district may wish to determine those changes which might be made to improve schools and move forward with an action plan. That plan might include:

- Conducting a survey to determine levels of support and levels of understanding of various proposals.

- Communicating school district initiatives to the school board and community.

- Assigning responsibility for each major initiative to an individual and/or task force to do further study, develop step-by-step plans, and explore budgetary and policy implications. Suggested objectives should be developed.

- Securing the needed policy and budgetary support, developing staff and community understanding through effective communication, and providing the training needed to make the program effective.

- Monitor the program to assure that it is working and make modifications as needed to ensure success.

4. Consider forming a coalition for excellence in your community involving representatives from several key groups, such as: parents, business and industry, labor, nonparents, educators, government leaders, and others. The result of this effort should be an appreciation of the important role of education in the community and the need for community support. Each group should understand the role it must play if the schools are to be as effective as possible. The schools can't do it alone. They need help and support. Work to build a consensus for quality schools.

5. Place your substantive efforts to improve under a theme such as: "Public Education: A Sound Investment In America." This theme was recently adopted by the Forum of Education Organization Leaders, representing eleven major national educational leadership groups.

6. Through speeches, newsletters, contacts with parents, non-parents, community leaders and the news media, communicate key concepts mentioned in the report, such as: our national interest in education; the fact that education is an investment, not an expense; our schools have helped build one of the greatest nations on earth, but in a fast changing society, our schools need the support of the community, state and nation to keep pace; and the high cost of educational neglect. Continue to keep your staff and community informed. Support can only grow from high quality and effective communication.

7. Remember that the Commission report provides a tool for improvement and for getting education back on our nation's agenda. It is up to all of us to establish the programs and build the support to make our schools even better. We are the leaders. It's up to us. ☐



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